

CHAPTER 10: MEDICAL STANDARDS

Physical Fitness and Conditioning

Agency Administrators are responsible for ensuring the overall physical fitness of firefighters. The Agency Administrator may authorize employees who are available and/or serving in wildland or prescribed fire positions that require a physical fitness rating of arduous, one hour daily for fitness conditioning. All other wildland firefighting personnel may be authorized up to three hours per week of duty time for fitness conditioning. Furthermore, individuals who have a position with an arduous physical requirement may be periodically tested during the fire season to ensure they are retaining the required level of fitness and conditioning.

Fitness conditioning periods may be identified and structured to include aerobic and muscular exercises. Team sports are not authorized for fitness conditioning. Guidance concerning training specifically for the pack test, aerobic fitness programs, and muscular fitness training can be found in Chapters 7, 8, and 9 of *Fitness and Work Capacity, 2nd ed. (1997)*, http://fsweb.mtdc.wo.fs.fed.us/php/library_card.php?p_num=9751%202814.

Work Capacity Tests (WCTs)

The BLM has adopted the NWCG approved Work Capacity Tests (WCTs) as the official method of assessing wildland firefighter fitness levels. For more information see the *Work Capacity Tests for Wildland Firefighters, Test Administrator's Guide*, PMS 307, NFES# 1109, <http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/pubs.htm>.

WCTs are administered annually to all employees, including emergency hires known as ADs/EFFs, who will be serving in wildland or prescribed fire positions that require a fitness level. The currency for the WCT is 12 months.

Administration of the WCT and certification of non-agency firefighters is prohibited for liability reasons. Potential emergency firefighters who would be hired under Administratively Determined (AD) Emergency Hire authority by the agency must be in AD pay status or sign an agency-specific volunteer services agreement when given the WCT.

Personnel taking the WCT will only complete the level of testing (pack, field, or walk) required by the highest fitness level identified for a position on their Incident Qualification Card (Red Card).

Agency Administrators (or delegates) are responsible for ensuring that the Health Screen Questionnaire (HSQ) is administered prior to initiating a physical training program and/or the WCT.

Agency Administrators (or delegates) for offices who have implemented the *Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighter Medical Qualification Standards*, http://www.nifc.gov/medical_standards/index.htm, are responsible for ensuring that medical clearance is given for each employee/incumbent prior to administering the WCT.

Test results must also be entered in the Incident Qualifications Certification System (IQCS) annually to update the fitness level and date that will appear on the Incident Qualification Card. Physical fitness dates entered in IQCS will reflect the date the employee passed the fitness test. The information on this health screen is considered confidential and must be filed in the employee's Official Medical File (OMF).

WCT Retesting

Those who do not pass the WCT will be provided another opportunity to retest. Employees must wait at least 48 hours before retaking the WCT. If an employee sustains an injury (verified by a licensed medical provider) during a test, the test will not count as an attempt. Once an injured employee has been released for full duty, the employee will be given time to prepare for the test (not to exceed 4 weeks). Allowed WCT retesting opportunities include:

- Three opportunities for permanent employees.
- One opportunity for temporary employees (a second chance may be provided at the discretion of fire management).

WCT Categories

The *NWCG Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification System Guide, PMS 310-1*, identifies WCTs for agency-specific positions. The arduous, moderate, and light fitness levels require an individual to demonstrate their ability to perform the fitness requirements of the position. Duties in the "none" category are normally performed in a controlled environment, such as an incident base.

Any position requiring an individual to be on the fireline unescorted for suppression or non-suppression tasks will be required to have passed the WCT at the "light" physical fitness level. This requirement applies even to positions which are identified in the PMS 310-1 with a fitness level of "none."

Work Capacity Test Standards

WORK CATEGORY TEST	DISTANCE	WEIGHT	TIME
Arduous Pack Test	3 miles	45 lb.	45 min.
Moderate Field Test	2 miles	25 lb.	30 min.
Light Walk Test	1 mile	None	16 min.

WCT Administration

An HSQ will be administered prior to initiating a physical training program and/or the WCT with the following objectives:

- To identify, prior to the WCT, at-risk personnel.
- To identify existing injuries or illness and minimize the probability of new injuries.
- To establish the need for a medical examination (see Medical Examinations criteria below).

A Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) shall be developed and approved for each field office prior to administering the WCT.

When the WCT is administered, the JHA should be used as a briefing guide. The WCT Administrator needs to document using the HSQ. All HSQ documents must be retained until the next testing period.

Health Screen Questionnaire (HSQ)

The purpose of the HSQ is to identify individuals who may be at risk in preparing for and completing the WCT. If an employee is found to be at risk during this process, a recommended exercise program and/or medical examination may be needed.

Title 5 CFR Part 339 – Medical Qualification Determinations, which provides a determination of an individual's fitness-for-duty, authorizes solicitation of this information. The HSQ can be found in Appendix W of the *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* (Redbook), <http://www.fire.blm.gov/Standards/redbook.htm>.

The information on the HSQ is considered confidential and once reviewed by the test administrator to determine if the WCT can be administered, it must be kept in the employee's

OMF. This file may only be viewed by Human Resource Management (HRM) or safety personnel and the identity of the individual must be protected.

Solicitation of this information is authorized by Title 5 U.S. Code Section 3301, which provides for a determination of an individual's fitness-for-duty.

Work Capacity Test (WCT) Record

Units will document the administration of all employee and job applicant WCTs. This documentation must be retained until the next WCT is administered. Units may also be requested to provide data from these records to assist in the evaluation of the WCT process.

Medical Examinations

Agency Administrators and supervisors are responsible for the occupational health and safety of their employees performing wildland and prescribed fire activities, and may require employees to take a medical examination at any time.

Established medical qualification programs, as stated in 5 CFR 339, provide consistent medical standards in order to safeguard the health of employees whose work may subject them or others to significant health and safety risks due to occupational or environmental exposure or demand.

The new *Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighter Medical Qualification Standards*, http://www.nifc.gov/medical_standards/index.htm, continue to be implemented throughout the BLM. Those units who have not yet implemented the new standards must continue to comply with the current standards as stated below until implementation of the new standards is accomplished. Where Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighter Medical Qualification Standards are implemented, no person will be employed as an arduous duty firefighter under AD/EFF hiring authority if they have:

- Failed to gain clearance through the Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighters Medical Qualification Standards Program under any pay authority, or;
- Personal knowledge of any physical reason that would prohibit them from carrying out arduous duties, or;
- Medical professional's advice of any physical reason that would prohibit them from carrying out the duties of a wildland firefighter.

All employees who participate in wildland or prescribed fire activities requiring a arduous, moderate, or light fitness level must answer all the questions on the HSQ prior to taking their WCT.

The information on any medical records is considered confidential and must be kept in the employee's OMF. All permanent, career-seasonal, temporary, and Student Career Experience

Program (SCEP) employees who participate in wildland or prescribed fire activities requiring a fitness level of “arduous” must have a current medical examination prior to attempting the WCT. Thereafter, employees 40 years of age and older must have a medical examination three years or as indicated by the HSQ.

Stress electrocardiograms (EKGs) are not required as part of the medical examination and will only be approved if recommended and administered by the medical exam physician.

If any “Yes” answer is indicated on the HSQ, a medical examination is required prior to the employee taking the WCT or if there is a known pre-existing medical condition that is already being monitored under medical care (e.g., high blood pressure), a medical clearance statement may be provided by the physician prior to taking WCT.

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